



# Iowa General Assembly

## 2008 Committee Briefings

LSA – Legal Services Division

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### MASS TRANSIT STUDY COMMITTEE

Meeting Dates: [November 14, 2008](#)

**Purpose.** *This compilation of briefings on legislative interim committee meetings and other meetings and topics of interest to the Iowa General Assembly, written by the Legal Services Division staff of the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency, describes committee activities or topics. The briefings were originally distributed in the Iowa Legislative Interim Calendar and Briefing. Official minutes, reports, and other detailed information concerning the committee or topic addressed by a briefing can be obtained from the committee's Internet page listed above, from the Iowa General Assembly's Internet page at <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>, or from the agency connected with the meeting or topic described.*

### MASS TRANSIT STUDY COMMITTEE

November 14, 2008

**Co-Chairperson:** Senator Matt McCoy

**Co-Chairperson:** Representative Beth Wessel-Kroeschell

**Overview.** The Mass Transit Study Committee elected Senator Matt McCoy and Representative Beth Wessel-Kroeschell as permanent co-chairpersons and received testimony.

**Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT).** Mr. Neil Volmer, Mr. Peter Hallock, Ms. Tamara Nicholson, and Mr. Stuart Anderson of IDOT, testified. Mr. Volmer reviewed the duties and schedule of the TIME-21 Public Transit Funding Study. He identified the types of transit available in the state and the number of rides and revenue miles for large urban, small urban, and regional transit systems during a one-year period. Mr. Volmer identified the average portion of local, state, and federal transit funding received by large urban, small urban, and regional transit systems. Sources of funding were addressed for transit infrastructure and vehicles and the transit funding challenges in the future on the local, state, and federal levels. He also identified issues relating to the adequacy of transit services in the state. Mr. Volmer provided information relating to transit funding in other states in the Midwest region. Ms. Nicholson discussed the existing Amtrak long-distance network as well as the state's long-range transportation plan for Iowa's passenger rail system. Ms. Nicholson discussed the Amtrak feasibility studies for passenger rail service from Chicago to Dubuque, from Chicago to the Quad Cities, and from the Quad Cities to Iowa City. IDOT is developing a proposed passenger rail funding program for Iowa for the 2009 legislative session.

**Former and Current Mass Transit Administrators.** Three current and former administrators for transit authorities in Iowa testified.

- Mr. Bob Bourne, the former 25-year administrator of CyRide in Ames, testified regarding the many successes of CyRide and other transit success stories around the state. Mr. Bourne addressed the difficulties of intercity transit service including the reluctance of cities to provide the service and stated that establishing such services requires creative thinking and identifying natural city pairs such as Des Moines and Ames.
- Mr. Brad Miller, General Manager, Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority, discussed the benefits of regional transit districts under Iowa Code Chapter 28M including the independent taxing authority. Mr. Miller stated that transit infrastructure is significantly underfunded, that ridership is increasing, that costs are increasing, and the funding is flat or declining. Mr. Miller stated that an investment in transit can provide economic stimulus, help reduce the transportation costs for families, improve mobility for the aging population, improve the environment, improve traffic congestion, provide vibrant downtowns, and provide university communities with a competitive advantage.
- Ms. Pam Ward, Transit Administrator, Ottumwa Transit Authority, discussed the increasing transit costs and declining state transit assistance and the effects of increasing demand and ridership. She discussed the significant vehicle infrastructure cost and the stress such costs put on a transit agency.

**Rail Service.** Mr. Kevin Brubaker, Deputy Director, Environmental Law and Policy Center, testified regarding

passenger rail service in Illinois and Iowa. An Amtrak feasibility study has been completed for Chicago-Quad Cities-Iowa City, and a feasibility study for an extension to Des Moines will be completed next year. The estimated cost for the extension of Amtrak in Iowa is reasonable and Mr. Brubaker encouraged the General Assembly to pursue expanded passenger rail service in Iowa.

**Iowa Public Policy Center.** Mr. John Fuller, Professor, University of Iowa, Iowa Public Policy Center, testified regarding increasing intercity transit through private intercity busing, existing regional services, and Amtrak. He testified that land use changes will likely be necessary for greater urban density if urban transit is going to offer more services. Mr. Fuller stated that public transportation vehicles must be filled with passengers in order to have a significant impact on fuel use and greenhouse gases. Mr. Fuller urged caution when considering demand and cost estimates for public transportation projects and suggested increasing the sales tax on gasoline to financially support public transit in Iowa.

**Department of Elder Affairs (DEA).** Mr. John McCalley, Director, DEA, testified regarding unmet service needs for elderly Iowans as reported to the department by the 13 area agencies on aging. The unmet needs were due to no funding or inadequate funding and did not reflect instances where service providers were unavailable. Mr. McCalley suggested that \$1.1 million is needed to cover the unmet needs.

**Iowa Office of Energy Independence.** Ms. Jennifer Wright, Deputy Director, Iowa Office of Energy Independence, discussed the economic and environmental impacts of decreasing the amount of vehicle miles traveled. She stated that mass transit is part of the Iowa Energy Independence Plan. Ms. Wright identified the challenges to transit and energy as the increasing costs to maintain infrastructure, the costs to develop new or redesign current infrastructure, prioritizing environmental and economic viability, and promoting collaboration between communities to implement change.

**Recommendations.** The study committee adopted eight recommendations for inclusion in the final report. The recommendations included informing the Iowa Congressional delegation of the importance of passenger rail service in Iowa, exploring new possible funding alternatives for public transit, considering incentives to increase ridership, encouraging community-to-community public transit access, creating a matching fund to maximize investment in public transit vehicles and infrastructure, encouraging the reduction in vehicle miles traveled by the citizens of Iowa, promoting urban density, and continuing the Mass Transit Study Committee for the 2009 interim.

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